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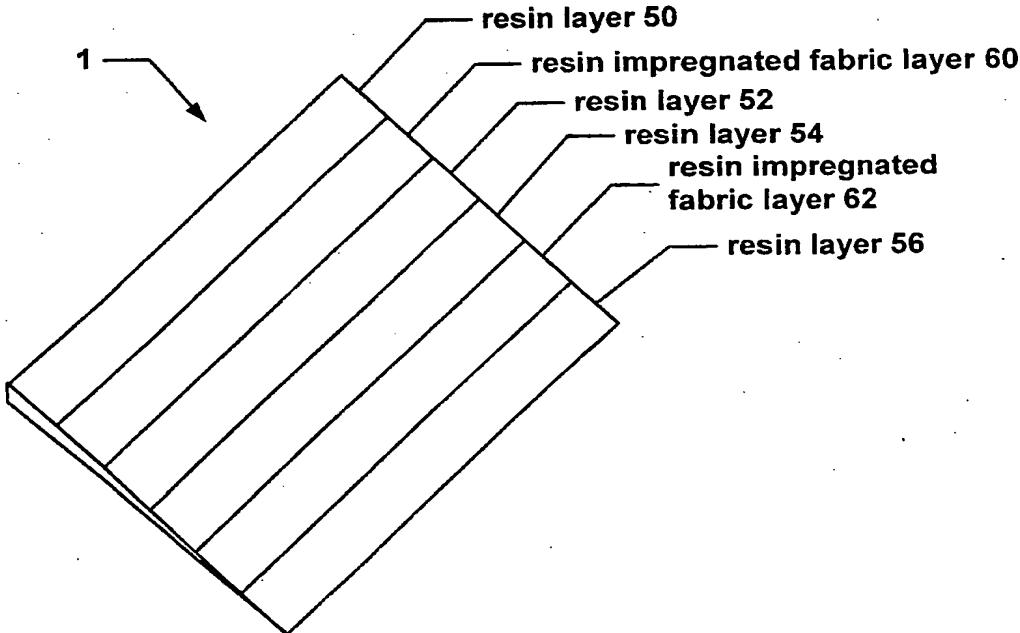
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(54) Title: HIGH STRENGTH, LONG DURABILITY STRUCTURAL FABRIC/SEAM SYSTEM



(57) Abstract: A high strength, high modulus structural fabric product and the method of manufacturing the product are disclosed. The incorporation of a specific fiber/fabric treatment coupled with a resin impregnation and coating process produces a composite material. This composite material comprises high strength and modulus fibers embedded in and linked to a matrix. The resulting fabric product is useable in the formation of seamed structures, which carry and distribute high-level loads under extreme environmental conditions.

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*For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.*

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## TITLE

High Strength, Long Durability Structural Fabric/Seam System

## 5 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to treated woven, knitted or unidirectional fabric, and more particularly to a treated woven, knitted or unidirectional fabric which is used to provide structures that can withstand high level working loads and extreme environmental conditions.

10

## BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Woven or knitted fabrics coated with a resin such as Poly-Vinyl Chloride (PVC), polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), urethane or other suitable resin have been used to provide structures. The fibers or fiber bundles of the woven fabric are coated with a resin, thereby forming a matrix surrounding the fibers. The matrix material is typically the medium, by which seams in the construction, can transfer load across the joints in the fabric. One example of such a structure is a radome, which is a dome shaped protective housing used to cover a radar antenna. A radome may be subject to a severe set of conditions such as supporting heavy loads for extended periods of time at extreme temperatures and humidity.

Traditional fabric structures apply resin-based coatings to the fabric substrate via 'knife-over-roll' or film lamination techniques. In order to take structural advantage of a fiber structure, applied loads should be able to transfer from one fiber bundle to another and the full load capability of the fabric should be able to be transferred across joints in the fabric. The resin system applied to the fabric assists with load transfer. However, the effectiveness of this load transferring ability is directly related to the interface between the fiber and the resin. This interface is dependent both on the volume of surface contacted, the linkage between the fiber surface and the resin, and the resin properties. When a fabric is coated with resin, the coating is only in contact with the exposed outer surface of

the fiber bundles and, effectively, the fiber/resin product (also referred to as the fabric product) is full of voids or air pockets within the fiber bundles. When an applied load encounters a void, the load cannot be transferred or carried from fiber filament to filament. The propagation of the load effectively stops and a stress concentration 5 develops that eventually exceeds the fabric load resistance, resulting in a failure of the fabric product. This effect is most pronounced at the fabric seam locations where the fiber bundles are not continuous across the joint.

10 A drawback associated with these coated woven fabrics and seams is that when they are utilized to provide a structure such as a radome, they typically do not withstand the long duration, high level working loads and extreme environmental conditions.

15 One attempt to resolve the above-mentioned drawback was to increase the base fabric load carrying capability, load transfer capability and fiber bundle load sharing capability by modifying existing fabric weave designs. These attempts did not produce a fabric/seam system product, which could withstand the working loads and environmental conditions mentioned above. Another attempt to overcome the above mentioned drawback involved development of new fabric/fiber technology. Although this attempt utilized innovative fiber and fabric designs, this attempt relied on traditional fabric 20 coating technology that failed to achieve the required combination of properties between the fiber system and the resin matrix, resulting in premature seam failure. The net result of both attempts was unacceptable operation in the area of seam performance of the structure.

25 **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

30 A high strength, high modulus structural fabric product and the method of manufacturing the product are presented. The incorporation of a fiber/fabric treatment coupled with a resin impregnation and coating process produces a composite material. This composite material comprises high strength and modulus fibers embedded in and coupled to a matrix such that the resin matrix material penetrates to the filament level of the fiber bundle. The resulting fabric product is useable in the formation of structures,

which carry and distribute high-level loads across seams under extreme environmental conditions.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

5 The invention will be more fully understood from the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a diagram of the fabric product; and

Figure 2 is a flow chart of the process utilized to produce the fabric product.

#### 10 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention comprises a high strength, high modulus structural fabric product and the method of manufacturing the product. Utilizing a fiber/fabric treatment and a resin impregnation and coating process a fabric product useable in air-supported structures, which is able to carry and distribute high level loads across seams under 15 extreme environmental conditions and with high levels of survivability, is provided. The incorporation of a fiber/fabric treatment coupled with a resin impregnation and coating process produces a composite material. This composite material comprises high strength and modulus fibers embedded in and coupled to a matrix such that the resin matrix material penetrates to the filament level of the fiber bundle. In this form, both the fibers 20 and the matrix retain their physical and chemical identities, and further produce a combination of properties that are not achieved with either constituent acting alone.

In general, the fibers of the fabric are the principal load carrying members. The fabric is combined with a surrounding resin matrix which keeps the fibers in a desired 25 location and orientation. The surrounding matrix further acts as a load transfer medium between the fibers, provides a shear load transfer medium across seams and protects the fibers from damage due to environmental conditions such as temperature, humidity, and sunlight.

30 The present invention utilizes a resin application technology that effectively

'impregnates' a fabric substrate such that the resin surrounds fibers and fiber bundles and infiltrates the fiber bundles to the filament level. The result is a fabric structure that has the combined properties of the resin for load transfer capabilities and the fiber/fabric system to carry loads.

5

Referring to Figure 1, a sectional isometric view of a particular embodiment of a fabric product 1 incorporating the present invention is shown. The fabric product 1 includes resin impregnated fabric layer 60. The resin impregnated fabric layer includes a fabric made of fibers such as Vectran®, Kevlar® or other high performance fiber which has been impregnated with the resin. As discussed above, the resin surrounds and infiltrates the fiber bundles of the fabric to the filament level.

10 The resin impregnated layer 60 has a resin coating layer 50 disposed across a top surface and a resin coating layer 52 disposed across the bottom surface. The resin coating layers thus cover the top and bottom surfaces of the resin impregnated fabric layer. Also shown is a second resin impregnated layer 62, which also has a resin coating layer 54 disposed across a top surface and a resin coating layer 56 disposed across the bottom surface of the resin impregnated fabric layer 62. While fabric product 1 comprising two-layers of the resin layer-resin impregnated fabric layer-resin layer groups is shown it should be appreciated that a fabric product could be comprises of any number of resin 20 impregnated fabric layers and resin layers.

25 The resulting fabric product 1 may contain one or more resin impregnated fabric layers, 60 and 62 which are formed using a two-part castable urethane or other suitable resin system capable of providing resin penetration to individual filaments of the fabric. As an example, traditional two part castable urethane systems use a resin to curative stoichiometry range of 85 to 110% theory. The curative stoichiometry refers to the ratio of chemical components and the ratio of reaction to each of the components. Typical stoichiometry are in the 95% range. A fabric product produced using a resin system 85 – 30 110% stoichiometry range did not achieve the desired performance.

Traditionally, stoichiometry range levels below 85% have not been used, with the belief that an unusable polymer would result. However, by using a 75% stoichiometry range level, the resulting composite (also referred to as an impregnation compound) 5 yielded both high shear strength under high seam loads and uniform strength throughout the composite. This result is in direct contrast to prior experience and recommendations of resin manufacturers.

In a particular embodiment the impregnation compound includes three 10 components: a urethane pre-polymer, a co-reactant curative, and a diluent, such as toluene. The impregnation compound in this embodiment is formulated as follows:

Polyurethane Specialties Pre-Polymer PCA 6-3	100.0 Parts by weight
Uniroyal Chemical Caytur 31 curative	26.1 Parts by weight

15

The mixture is then diluted to 75% total solids with toluene. The ratio of curative to pre-polymer is derived from the formula:

$$\frac{6.34 \times 0.75 \times 230}{42} = \text{parts by weight of curative per 100 parts of pre-polymer}$$

20

where 6.34 is the isocyanate content of the pre-polymer, 0.75 is the desired stoichiometry, 230 is the equivalent weight of the curative, and 42 is the equivalent weight of the isocyanate.

25

As described above, traditional fabric structures apply resin based coatings to the fabric. When a fabric is coated with resin, the coating is only in contact with the outer filaments of the fiber bundles and, effectively, the fiber/resin system is full of voids or air pockets within the fiber bundles. When an applied load encounters a void, the load cannot be transferred or carried. The propagation of the load effectively stops and a stress 30 concentration develops that eventually becomes greater than the fiber/fabric strength.

These coating techniques do not drive the resin into the interstitial sites of the fabric nor into the individual fiber bundles or fiber filaments of the fabric.

5 A flow chart of the presently disclosed method for applying the impregnating compound into the fabric is depicted in Figure 2. The rectangular elements are herein denoted "processing blocks" and represent instructions or groups of instructions.

10 The method of producing the fabric product is described in conjunction with the flow chart of Figure 2. The method 100 begins at processing block 110 wherein the base fabric is scoured to remove any lubricants applied by the yarn manufacturer, or those lubricants applied by the weaver. These lubricants could interfere with the development of high integrity resin to the base fabric interface. After scouring, processing proceeds with processing block 120.

15 Processing block 120 recites treating the fabric with a polymeric isocyanate to enhance adhesion of the impregnation compound to the fabric. Processing block 130 is performed next wherein the impregnation of the base fabric is performed. The impregnation of the fabric involves the continuous submersion of the fabric in a tank containing the impregnation compound.

20 At processing block 140, after the fabric emerges from the tank, the fabric is squeezed by a set of nip rolls to further drive the impregnation compound into the fabric fibers and to remove any excess impregnation compound.

25 The fabric is then fed into a drying oven, as shown in processing block 150. Preferably the drying oven is set at a temperature as required to remove diluents from the fabric-resin composite.

30 Processing block 170 is executed next wherein the resulting impregnated fabric is post cured at a temperature as required to cure the resin system. Following processing

block 170 the fabric is ready for subsequent processing.

The resulting impregnated fabric is incorporated into the fabric product and is used to produce fabric structures. In the case of a radome incorporating the present 5 invention, the radome fabric can withstand working loads as high as 880 pounds per inch width for 56 hours at a temperature of 35 degrees C in a humid environment. This invention allows the use of thermally welded seams to meet these demanding requirements. Seams made from this material are able to withstand in excess of 56 hours at 880 pounds per inch load, with high humidity, at 35<sup>0</sup>C using an overlap seam 10 construction. This seam performance has not been achieved in other flexible composite applications

A high strength, high modulus structural fabric product and the method of manufacturing the product have been described. The incorporation of a specific 15 fiber/fabric treatment coupled with resin impregnation and coating processes produces a composite material. This composite material comprises high strength and modulus fibers embedded in and coupled to a matrix. The resulting fabric product is useable in the formation of seamed structures which carry and distribute high-level loads under extreme environmental conditions.

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Having described preferred embodiments of the invention it will now become apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art that other embodiments incorporating these concepts may be used. Accordingly, it is submitted that that the invention should not be limited to the described embodiments but rather should be limited only by the spirit and 25 scope of the appended claims. All publications and references cited herein are expressly incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An impregnation compound for a fabric product comprising:
  - 5 a pre-polymer;
  - a co-reactant curative; and
  - a diluent, said diluent solvating the mixture of said pre-polymer and said curative, and wherein said impregnation compound has a curative stoichiometry range of less than 85 percent.
- 10 2. The impregnation compound of claim 1 wherein said impregnation compound has a curative stoichiometry range of approximately 75 percent.
3. The impregnation compound of claim 1 wherein said pre-polymer comprises an amount of 100.0 parts by weight.
- 15 4. The impregnation compound of claim 1 wherein said co-reactant curative comprises an amount of 26.1 parts by weight.
5. The impregnation compound of claim 1 wherein pre-polymer comprises a  
20 urethane pre-polymer.
6. The impregnation compound of claim 1 wherein said diluent comprises a solvent.
- 25 7. The impregnation compound of claim 1 wherein the ratio of said curative to said pre-polymer is derived from the formula
$$\frac{6.34 \times 0.75 \times 230}{42} = \text{parts by weight of curative per 100 parts of pre-polymer}$$
where 6.34 is the isocynate content of the pre-polymer, 0.75 is the desired stoichiometry, 230 is the equivalent weight of the curative and 42 is the equivalent weight  
30 of the isocynate.

8. A method of impregnating a fabric with an impregnation compound comprising:

5       impregnating the fabric with the impregnation compound;  
          driving the compound into the fabric fibers;  
          removing excess compound; and  
          drying said fabric.

9. The method of claim 8 further comprising scouring the fabric before said  
10 impregnating.

10. The method of claim 8 further comprising treating the fabric before said impregnating.

15 11. The method of claim 8 wherein said treating the fabric comprises treating the fabric with a polymeric isocyanate to enhance linkage of the impregnation compound to the fabric.

12. The method of claim 8 wherein said impregnating comprises submersing said  
20 fabric in a tank of the impregnation compound.

13. The method of claim 8 wherein said driving the compound into fabric fibers comprises running said fabric through a set of rollers.

25 14. The method of claim 8 wherein said drying is done in an oven having a temperature sufficient to remove a diluent from said impregnating compound.

15. The method of claim 8 wherein said impregnation compound comprises:  
a pre-polymer;  
30 a co-reactant curative; and

a diluent, said diluent solvating the mixture of said pre-polymer and said curative, and wherein said impregnation compound has a curative stoichiometry range of less than 85 percent.

5 16. The method of claim 15 wherein said impregnation compound has a curative stoichiometry range of approximately 75 percent.

17. The method of claim 15 wherein said impregnation compound has a ratio of said curative to said pre-polymer according to the formula

10 
$$\frac{6.34 \times 0.75 \times 230}{42} = \text{parts by weight of curative per 100 parts of pre-polymer}$$

where 6.34 is the isocynate content of the pre-polymer, 0.75 is the desired stoichiometry, 230 is the equivalent weight of the curative and 42 is the equivalent weight of the isocynate.

15 18. A fabric product comprising at least one resin fabric piece, said resin fabric piece comprising:

a resin impregnated fabric layer;

20 a first resin layer disposed on a first side of said resin impregnated fabric layer;  
and

a second resin layer disposed on a second side of said resin impregnated fabric layer.

19. The fabric product of claim 18 wherein resin comprises:

25 a pre-polymer;

a co-reactant curative; and

a diluent, said diluent solvating the mixture of said pre-polymer and said curative, and wherein said impregnation compound has a curative stoichiometry range of less than 85 percent.

20. The fabric product of claim 19 wherein said resin has a curative stoichiometry range of approximately 75 percent.

21. The fabric product of claim 19 wherein said resin has a ratio of said curative to said pre-polymer in accordance with the formula

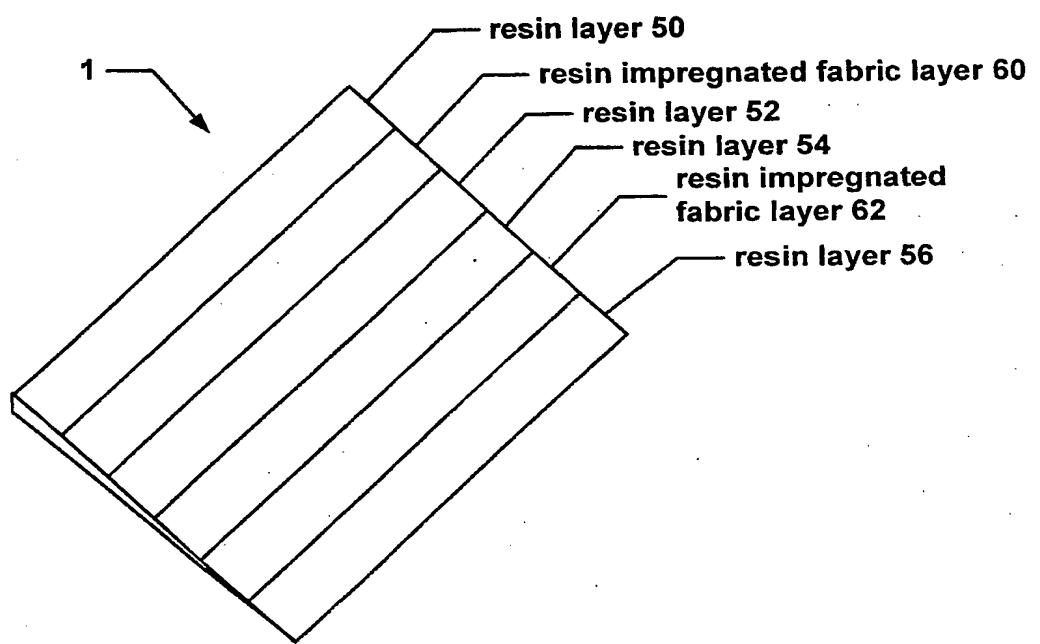
$$\frac{6.34 \times 0.75 \times 230}{42} = \text{parts by weight of curative per 100 parts of pre-polymer}$$

where 6.34 is the isocynate content of the pre-polymer, 0.75 is the desired stoichiometry, 230 is the equivalent weight of the curative and 42 is the equivalent weight of the isocynate.

10

22. The fabric product of claim 18 further comprising a second resin fabric piece disposed along a surface of said second resin layer.

1/2



**FIGURE 1**

2/2

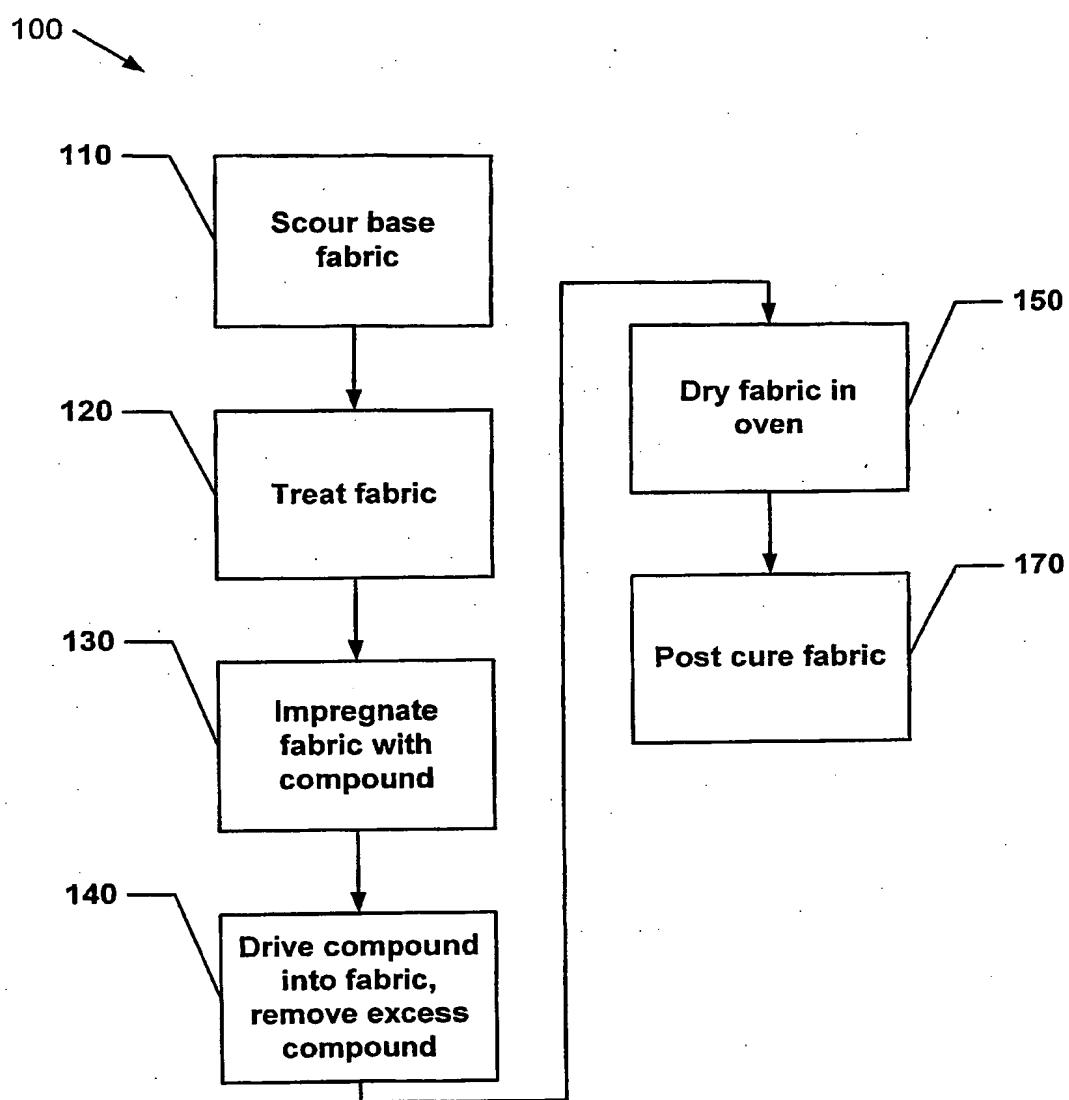


FIGURE 2

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(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): ELSWORTH, Sharon, A. [US/US]; 840 Starch Mill Road, Mason, NH 03048 (US). FREDBERG, Marvin, I. [US/US]; 175 Poskus Street, Stoughton, MA 02072 (US). FOSSEY, William, H., Jr. [US/US]; 9 Wall Street, Arlington, MA 02476 (US). PRESS, Stuart, C. [US/US]; 225 Moose Hill Road, Gilford, CT 06437 (US). FREDRICKSON, Thad, H. [US/US]; 579 Ruyter Drive, Frederica, DE 19946 (US).

(74) Agents: ROUILLE, David, W. et al.; Suite 101, 275 Turnpike Street, Canton, MA 02021 (US).

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

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For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

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(54) Title: HIGH STRENGTH, LONG DURABILITY STRUCTURAL FABRIC/SEAM SYSTEM

(57) Abstract: A high strength, high modulus structural fabric product and the method of manufacturing the product are disclosed. The incorporation of a specific fiber/fabric treatment coupled with a resin impregnation and coating process produces a composite material. This composite material comprises high strength and modulus fibers embedded in and linked to a matrix. The resulting fabric product is useable in the formation of seamed structures, which carry and distribute high-level loads under extreme environmental conditions.

# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No  
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## A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 7 D06N7/00 D06N3/14 C08G18/10 C08J5/24 C08J5/06  
C08J7/04

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

## B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)  
IPC 7 D06N C08J C08G B32B

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the International search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data

## C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 4 144 027 A (HABIB EMILE E) 13 March 1979 (1979-03-13) column 4, line 13 - line 15; examples XI, I, IV, VIII; table VI column 20, line 21 - line 24	1-7
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A	GB 833 075 A (GEN TIRE & RUBBER CO) 21 April 1960 (1960-04-21) page 2, line 118 - line 128	1-7
X		8, 9, 12-14
	-/-	

Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

Patent family members are listed in annex.

### \* Special categories of cited documents :

- \*A\* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
- \*E\* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
- \*L\* document which may throw doubts on priority, claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)
- \*O\* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
- \*P\* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

- \*T\* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
- \*X\* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
- \*Y\* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.
- \*&\* document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

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Pamies Olle, S

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PC 2004/003231

## C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	EP 0 636 472 A (SHELL INT RESEARCH) 1 February 1995 (1995-02-01) page 2, paragraph 1 page 2, line 50 - line 51	18
X	EP 1 097 804 A (MITSUI CHEMICALS INC) 9 May 2001 (2001-05-09) page 4, line 18 - line 19; figure 4 page 10, paragraph 65 - page 11, line 3	18
A	FR 2 544 322 A (STEVENS GENIN) 19 October 1984 (1984-10-19) claims 1,4-6,10,12; examples 4,7	1-7
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**Box II Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)**

This International Search Report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1.  Claims Nos.: because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
  
2.  Claims Nos.: because they relate to parts of the International Application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful International Search can be carried out, specifically:
  
3.  Claims Nos.: because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

**Box III Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 3 of first sheet)**

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

see additional sheet

1.  As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this International Search Report covers all searchable claims.
  
2.  As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, this Authority did not invite payment of any additional fee.
  
3.  As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this International Search Report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
  
4.  No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this International Search Report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

**Remark on Protest**

The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest.

No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

**FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM PCT/ISA/ 210**

This International Searching Authority found multiple (groups of) inventions in this international application, as follows:

1. claims: 1-7

An impregnation compound product comprising a pre-polymer, a co-reactant curative and a diluent.

2. claims: 8-17

Method for impregnating a fabric.

3. claims: 18-22

Fabric product comprising: resin layer / resin impregnated fabric / resin layer.

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No  
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